

CROSS-CUTTING FINDINGS FROM THE COMMUNITY PULSE FORUMS IN NORTHERN KOSOVO

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"It supports the achievement of the following SDGs: Gender Equality; Reduced Inequalities; Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; Partnerships for the Goals

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Between October and November 2025, a series of Community Pulse Forums were held in northern Kosovo, bringing together members of the local community from different sectors to discuss everyday challenges related to governance, security, access to services, and interethnic relations. The discussions took place in **North Mitrovica, Leposavić/q, and Zubin Potok**, providing space for open, locally grounded dialogue at a time of heightened political tension and institutional uncertainty.

This summary brief presents the **key cross-cutting findings** emerging from all three forums. While local contexts and experiences varied, participants articulated strikingly similar concerns, pointing to shared structural problems that continue to shape daily life in northern Kosovo.

Across all forums, participants described a deep sense of **institutional breakdown, insecurity, and prolonged stagnation**. Many expressed the feeling that everyday life is shaped less by clear rules and predictable institutions, and more by uncertainty, ad hoc decisions, and political considerations. This environment was widely seen as particularly damaging for young people, who increasingly perceive limited prospects for stability or long-term planning.

A dominant theme was the **erosion of trust in institutions**, especially the police, judiciary, and administrative bodies. Participants consistently emphasised that institutions are no longer perceived as providers of protection and public services, but rather as unpredictable, selective, and, at times, coercive. Numerous examples were shared of excessive policing, arbitrary fines, harassment, and discriminatory behavior, contributing to a pervasive climate of fear and insecurity. Women, children, and other vulnerable groups were identified as particularly exposed, with many incidents of harassment or violence remaining unreported due to lack of trust and inadequate institutional response.

Closely linked to this was a shared experience of **administrative exclusion and legal uncertainty**. Participants across all municipalities described long-standing difficulties in obtaining personal documents, registering property, verifying diplomas, and accessing social benefits. Language barriers — particularly the absence of adequate Serbian-language communication in institutions — were repeatedly cited as both a practical obstacle and a symbol of exclusion. These administrative challenges were seen as directly limiting employment opportunities, access to services, and full participation in public life.

Another recurring concern was the feeling of living “**between systems**”, without meaningful inclusion in either Kosovo or Serbian institutional frameworks. This duality has created a prolonged state of limbo, in which citizens rely on informal solutions, personal connections, or political mediation rather than predictable rules. Participants emphasized that this condition fuels apathy, discourages civic engagement, and reinforces the perception that individual efforts cannot lead to meaningful change.

Economic insecurity and depopulation emerged as central cross-cutting challenges. High unemployment, lack of investment, pressure on small businesses, and limited opportunities — especially in rural areas — were identified as key drivers of migration. Participants warned that young people increasingly see no future in their communities and are leaving in growing numbers. The absence of cultural, sports, and youth-oriented spaces was highlighted as further accelerating disengagement and outmigration.

The discussions also revealed broad dissatisfaction with **political representation and leadership**, both locally and centrally. Participants expressed distrust toward political elites in both Pristina and Belgrade, describing decision-making as opaque, centralized, and disconnected from local realities. Electoral processes were often viewed with skepticism, with participants questioning whether election outcomes genuinely reflect public trust or rather structural pressures and limited alternatives. The failure to implement key political commitments — most notably the Association of Serb-majority Municipalities — was repeatedly cited as a symbol of broken promises and institutional paralysis.

Interethnic relations were widely described as fragile and deteriorating. While everyday interpersonal interactions can remain functional, participants agreed that institutional practices, securitized governance, nationalist rhetoric, and media narratives have significantly eroded trust between communities. Several participants emphasized that coexistence is possible and has existed in practice, but that political instrumentalization of identity continues to undermine social cohesion and reinforce fear.

Despite widespread pessimism, participants across all forums stressed the importance of **dialogue and locally grounded engagement**. Community Pulse discussions were seen as rare spaces where frustrations could be openly articulated, shared problems recognized, and constructive ideas discussed beyond ethnic or political divides. Participants repeatedly underlined that restoring trust — particularly in institutions — improving communication, protecting vulnerable groups, and focusing on pragmatic improvements in everyday life are essential prerequisites for stability.

Overall, the combined discussions portray northern Kosovo as a space marked by **institutional fragility, social exhaustion, and declining confidence in political solutions**. At the same time, they reveal a persistent desire among citizens for normalcy, dignity, and safety, alongside a clear recognition that without inclusive governance, transparent institutions, and sustained engagement, current trends of disengagement and emigration are likely to continue.

